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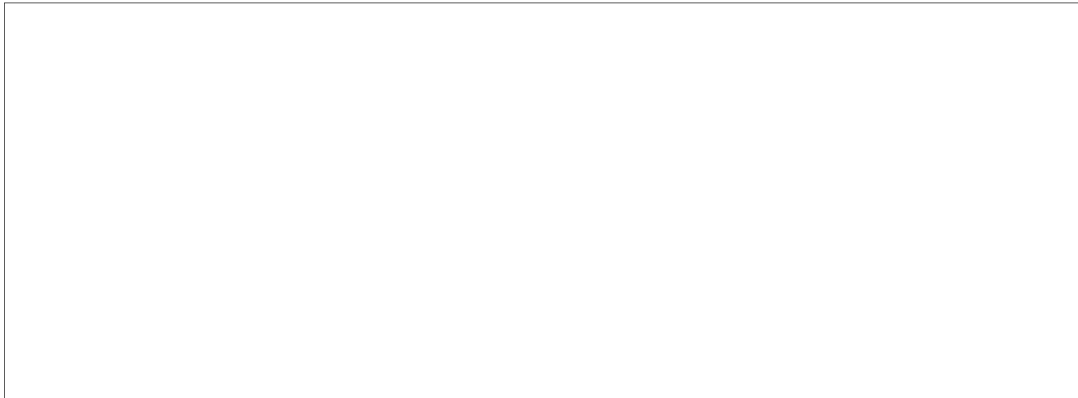
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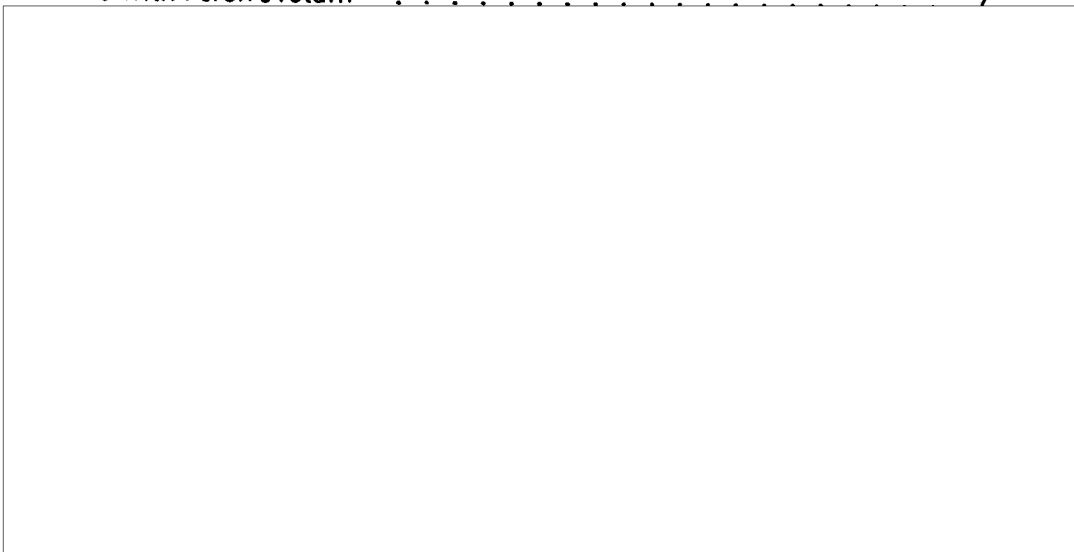
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ARGENTINA: Political lull to
end with Peron's return

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ARGENTINA

The relative political lull during President Maria Estela Peron's absence from the capital is giving way to growing controversy centering on her prospective return, scheduled for next week. While Peron herself has lost effective power and is unlikely to gain it back, the question of who will assume it is far from resolved.

Presidential spokesmen have said that Peron is well and plans to return to Buenos Aires on October 17 to address a mass rally marking Juan Peron's rise to power. A move may be under way, however, to persuade her to remain out of the picture, or at most accept a passive role. Some observers fear the possibility of violence if dissident Peronists—including the terrorist Montoneros—seek to disrupt the rally.

The eventual disposition of effective power will, of course, affect most directly the current governing team, led by Acting President Luder, Interior Minister Robledo, and Economy Minister Cafiero. They have managed to restore a measure of confidence in the government. All three realize that unless there is a satisfactory solution to the political problem of Peron's status, their ability to continue functioning will diminish steadily.

In addition, all three are potential contenders in the presidential election scheduled for 1977. For this reason, each has his own preferred solution to the problem. Luder, who is chief among those who favor Peron's continued absence, hopes to continue exercising presidential authority and build a case for his eventual election to a full term. Robledo, on the other hand, is said to favor restoring Peron to the presidency, at least as a figurehead, which would remove Luder from the scene. Cafiero, who has deftly avoided being identified with either side, would nonetheless benefit from Luder's departure; he would have one less person to contend with.

The military, whose unity and behind-the-scenes influence on politics have increased greatly in recent months, are eyeing the situation with concern. The high command is anxious to prolong the relative effectiveness of the Luder team—particularly its efforts to centralize the anti-terrorist struggle—and is dismayed by the resurging debate over Peron's role. Most officers probably favor her continued absence but would accept her return in a ceremonial role. They still favor a constitutional solution but are more likely than before to intervene openly, should political struggles once again paralyze the government.

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Top labor leaders also have a role to play. Peronist union boss Lorenzo Miguel is chief among those favoring Peron's retention of the presidency. He has been challenged, however, by another leading unionist, Buenos Aires Province Governor Calabro, who has presidential ambitions. Calabro's open call for Peron's ouster has contributed to a major split within labor.

There is considerable sentiment among the main political parties either for the President's indefinite absence or for her definitive departure. Indeed, her own party made an early expression of antagonism to her some months ago by choosing Luder as Senate president, which placed him next in line of succession. The chief opposition party, the Radical Civic Union, has proposed advancing the date of the presidential election by some six months. The Radicals clearly hope to capitalize on popular disgust with the Peron administration and fear that unless elections are held soon, the chances of a military coup will increase.

Much will depend on Peron herself. She appears determined, at least for the moment, to retain some role. Both Robledo and Luder visited the President this week, the former probably urging her to accept a ceremonial role and the latter recommending a longer rest. If she feels compelled to assert herself to comply with a sense of duty, her attitude may go a long way toward provoking the military to intervene.

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